

For Broadcast: 27th September 2020

SURVIVING SCHOOL AT HOME

Interview with Jo

Jo: *“I was at home with four children, homeschooling, a job I have never desired before and suddenly I was faced with “mum I need help, mum I’m hungry, mum I need this, mum I need that,” and I’d be standing at the door going enough already, this is too hard.”*

Celia: This is Messages of hope and I'm Celia Fielke. Over the past months we've all faced various levels of restrictions due to the pandemic. Some of us are in full on lockdown and for those of us who have it easier right now, the possibility of facing tougher restrictions again is not far from our thoughts. One of the big challenges for many families has been the need to homeschool kids while also working - all in the same building - home! How do you take on a challenge like that without getting overwhelmed and feeling like a failure?

Today on Messages of hope I'm talking with Jo. She has four kids, a part time job and her husband was in isolation from returning overseas. Jo definitely got overwhelmed and we're talking with her today about how she got through that without completely falling apart.

Celia: Jo, before COVID restrictions what was your life like?

Jo: Well I guess our life has always been quite busy. I was working part time, I have four children in three separate schools. One of my children has a disability. So I can't say my life was ever quiet. Then being stuck at home in COVID it's like suddenly you're in this small space amongst other people who are constantly demanding your attention. I thought I was good at organizing things but this was next level and there were moments where I was just saying “this is enough I can't do it.” It was a moment where I felt like I wasn't good enough.

Celia: Do you remember the moment when that really struck home?

Jo: So there was a particular moment after my husband had come back from overseas. He was isolated in the shed, he just couldn't physically be there for me. So he'd be standing there at dinner time standing outside on the veranda waiting for his meal because he couldn't come inside. I'd have one child in her room you know burrowed away hopefully still alive, I would have one child sitting in front of the computer screen and screaming at it and I'd have other children saying mum I need help, mum I'm hungry, mum I need this, mum I need that!! And so he would see me have these moments of complete frustration. I'll call it a meltdown. A lot of it was verbal. A lot of it was just in tears. I would be crying and I'd be sitting in my room thinking I'm totally and completely alone here.

Celia: Oh my gosh, that sounds pretty confronting.

Jo: It's really confronting for me because I guess I came to the end of myself where I realized what my limitations were and as much as I would love to say I was okay with that, I really wasn't. I wasn't okay with admitting that there was something that I just couldn't do. I've got friends who jump into homeschooling because they love being the educators in their family and I admire them for that but yeah If your child is struggling through online learning and I can't fix that, that was a really confronting thing for me to see. I couldn't fix anything. I couldn't make this go away.

Celia: Jo what would you say you've learnt about yourself, through what you would say was a fairly challenging time.

Jo: Because I'm a person who is a competent person, I would say I'm relatively good at most things. But in this situation, it was that eye opening moment that there are some things that I just can't do. I think being forced into this space of having to be the teacher and the parent was that moment where I felt so overwhelmed that I had to stop and think, well what am I capable of? What is the world asking of me and is that too much? I was honest enough in myself to say I was being asked to do more than I was capable of. It wasn't so much a reflection on I'm not good enough. It was a reflection on being able to say actually this is more than what I can handle and it's okay to admit that.

Celia: So when you got to that point of realizing I can't do all this I can't fix everything, how did you move forward?

Jo: I think I had to be honest with my children. I think I had to make them aware that some of this was beyond my ability. My children always expect me to have the right answer but the answer for most of it was "I don't know honey I don't know." I realized I had to step back, where I had to go for a walk or I had to go and sit and do something that I could do. Like for me maybe even just playing the piano or go do a puzzle or something that I could actually say I can tick that off and say yeah I actually can do things, put a load of washing on or something you know just to give myself a checklist that at the end of the day I can say "well actually Joanne, you did achieve something and that's good enough."

Celia: Yeah I know how important that is to feel like you've achieved something. That must have been an empowering thing for you.

Jo: I think if you actually spend the entire day trying to meet everybody else's needs, keeping up with the demands, you're setting yourself up for failure. I think being able to set yourself a timeframe and say "okay between four and six it's mummy time." That was the thing. Making compromises. Sitting the children in front of a device or setting them onto a Netflix movie for the afternoon is okay in this situation. Everybody's coping differently and rules get broken and that was the rule that got broken for me, putting my children in front of screens a little bit more than what I wanted was the way of our family getting through this without anybody being harmed or injured in the process! It's about making different choices that you know is only an interim thing but also making choices to actually allow for the space to recalibrate and to reenergize.

Celia: Jo what were the times you found most helpful for coping with all the extra demands?

Jo: There were a couple of moments where I just said "Okay kids, I'll be back soon. It's okay Mommy's okay." I'd go for a walk. We've got a reserve at the end of our road and I would just walk and walk furiously for the first 50 minutes. I'd be praying at the time. I'd be saying "God please talk to me because I don't know what to do."

I would listen to my music and I'd sing at the top of my lungs to get all that energy out. It was at those moments where it might even be a song that I'm listening to as I'm walking that would come on and it'd be quite an obvious response from God. You know, a peace song or a song about hope or some other song that just were the perfect words for me. I think I could honestly say that it would actually be God saying words to me like "you are loved, you are enough, peace Joanne, peace." That sensation washing over, feeling like I was lighter. And then the last 10 minutes of the walk it would be, okay I think I'm calm, I think I can reenter this place again.

Celia: So when you got back home how did that transfer back into the home space where everybody is probably right at you again?

Jo: Well I guess um, okay I'm approaching my house now, I know what's inside and you could probably have those moments of fear and frustration. "Do I really want to come back here." But the good news that I get from God is that when he honestly and completely tells me that I'm not alone, when I have that sense of peace wash over me, I know I can confidently go back into my home knowing I can handle it.

Celia: That's great. It sounds like God is someone you talk with, like a real person. How does that work?

Jo: I think the hardest thing for me was feeling like I was alone and feeling like I was the only person that had control over the situation. And so tapping into my relationship with God meant that I could bring all of my frustrations and all of my burdens and just have it out with God and actually tell him what's on my heart. I would actually sit there and I'd physically imagine this sack full of doubt and fear and frustration and worry and I would literally place it at the feet of Jesus at the cross. Just the imagery of that, of knowing that I can offload this to my God who loves me and cares for me and know that he wasn't going to judge me for it and know that he could handle it. But not only that, I would hear him come back and say Joanne you are enough, Joanne I love you just the way you are, for who you are. You are enough and you are doing an amazing job.

Celia: You've been listening to Messages of Hope. For free pdf's, videos and podcasts about coping with challenging times go to messagesofhope.org.au. Or for a free booklet call 1800 353 350.

Thank you for ordering a script of Messages of hope. We pray that it is of benefit to you and gives you hope.

You are free to share this with other people and offer them hope.

Messages of hope radio messages, scripts, and booklets are also available for you at www.messagesofhope.org.au

You can also order Messages of hope monthly CDs that have the radio messages on them.

If you would like to support us to reach out to more people with messages of hope, or you would like more information about us, please go to www.lutheranmedia.org.au or call FREECALL 1800 353 350, or write to us at Reply Paid 65735 Lutheran Media, 197 Archer Street. North Adelaide SA 5006.

Thank you for your interest and support of Messages of hope.

LUTHERAN.MEDIA)))
COMMUNICATING CHRIST